

Linking Science to Shorelines Management: Washington's Coastal Planners Group

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Science-Based Information in Context

A University-State Agency Partnership

Washington Sea Grant Program Marine Advisory Service's access to University researchers and commitment to outreach are partnered with Washington Department of Ecology's statewide responsibility to bring technical support to local shoreline jurisdictions that implement the Shoreline Management Act and the state's Coastal Zone Management Program..

Meetings are organized and facilitated by staff from Washington Department of Ecology and the University of Washington, but meeting content is chosen by the local planners themselves. Science and policy experts from universities, agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the consulting industry invited to present at meetings are coached on the audience's characteristics, level of scientific literacy and preferred presentation styles to ensure the planners' needs are being met.

This state-local-university partnership is believed to be unique among US coastal states and is a potential model for others concerned about continuing professional development for the coastal planning community.

History

Washington's Shoreline/Coastal Planners Group started in circa 1973 as an informal series of meetings between local government planners and Department of Ecology Shorelands Program staff. Its purpose was to share information about how local governments could develop shoreline master programs meeting the requirements of the 1971 Shoreline Management Act. For 10 years the group meetings were organized and chaired by a local government jurisdiction until, in the early 1980s, the group languished.

Spurred by the success of a shoreline erosion management workshop for local planners in 1991, Ecology's Shorelands Program and Washington Sea Grant teamed to reorganize the group and to introduce an explicit continuing professional development element into its meetings. Since its first meeting in September 1992, the reconstituted Shoreline & Coastal Planners Group has been convened quarterly to bring scientific and technical information to local government, ports and state agencies with jurisdiction over, or proprietary interest in the state's shorelines. In 1999, for the first time, external NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) funding was secured through the Padilla Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve coastal decision-makers workshops program.

Client-Based Continuing Professional Development

Formal Needs Assessments

Biennial surveys of local shoreline planners in western Washington are used to identify specific topics within four general topical clusters:

- Shoreline resources (e.g. nearshore habitat monitoring)
- Shoreline land and water uses (e.g. managing port development)
- Shoreline management administration (e.g. processing conditional use permits)
- Information technology (e.g. GIS applications).

Puget Sound Research 2001

Meeting times, duration, frequency and style are designed to fit local planners' needs and constraints.

Topics Linked to Locations

Quarterly meetings are held at rotating locations around Puget Sound and Coastal Washington so as to equalize travel time for local planners. When relevant, meeting topics are scheduled at an appropriate locale, e.g. a shellfish aquaculture meeting at Coupeville, or a joint city-port planning meeting at Everett.

Indicators of Success

Attendance at meetings

Average number of quarterly meetings attended in the preceding 12 months by July 1999 survey respondents was 2.25, despite rotating meetings around Puget Sound locations. Average meeting attendance during 1999-2000 was 46.5 from with a range of 26 to 77

Anecdotal expression of satisfaction

What could organizers do to make meetings better fit needs for information about contemporary shoreline/coastal management issues and address continuing professional development goals?

"The coastal meetings I have attended have been extremely educational. Any opportunity to discuss issues we all deal with is valuable."

"Keep up the good work."

"Doing great. Keep plugging away."

"The organizers are addressing our needs."

"Excellent job, keep meetings on Fridays!"

"I have been very happy with the meetings—an excellent selection of speakers & topics. Thanks."

(Source: 1997 Needs Assessment Survey, selected results.)